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Charity Organization Soc.  
of the City of New York.

Housing reform in  
New York City

[New York]

[1914]

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Housing

Housing Reform  
in  
New York City

308

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Box 131

Housing Reform  
in  
New York City

REPORT  
of the  
TENEMENT HOUSE COMMITTEE  
of the  
CHARITY ORGANIZATION SOCIETY  
OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
1911, 1912, 1913

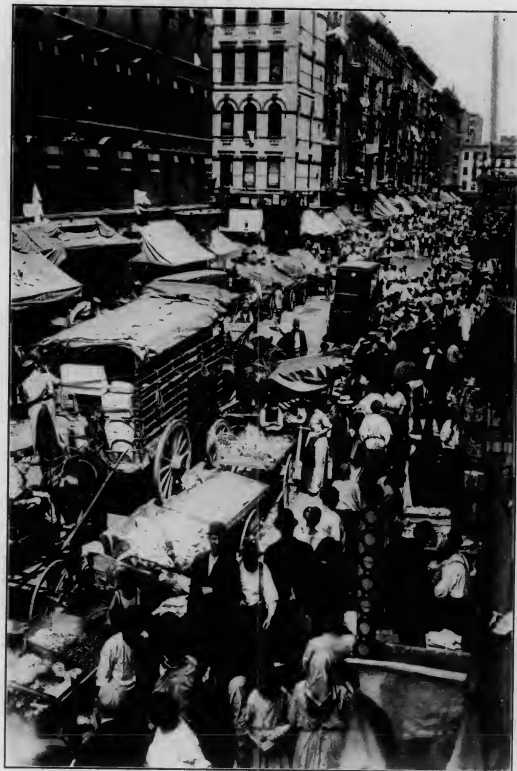
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Issued January, 1914

Sept. 14, 1923 N.C.



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THE MELTING POT.

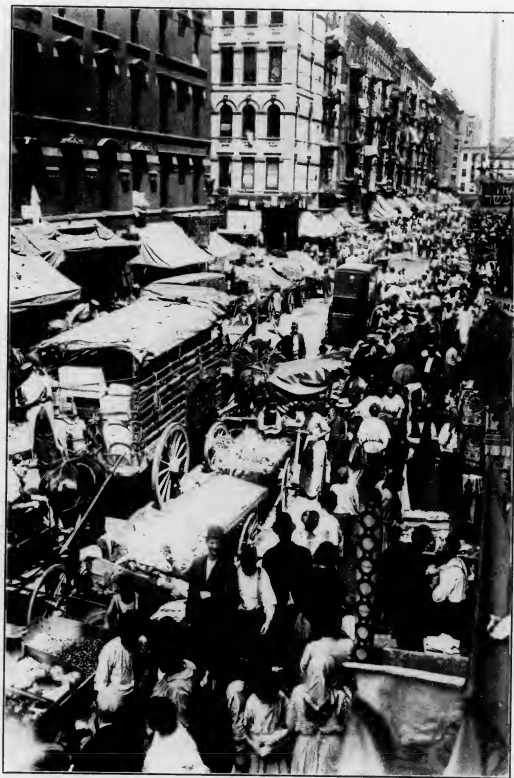
2,500 PEOPLE TO THE BLOCK. NOT ENOUGH STANDING ROOM IN THE STREET FOR ALL OF THEM AT ONE TIME.

## Housing Reform

EVERY stranger who visits Manhattan with seeing eyes is overwhelmed by the problems of congestion, of high buildings, of crowded streets, of tenement house life and the disorder due to the widely varying customs of our immigrant population. Sometimes we who live and work here allow our outlook to be limited by the width of the street, and the height of the buildings. We see bad conditions and do not remember how much they have been and are being bettered. A look backward is often more illuminating than a look forward.

When one commences to analyze the statistics which are the uninteresting but accurate measure of progress, it is encouraging to find what great gains have been made. The Board of Health reports that the death rate per thousand inhabitants for Greater New York has decreased in the ten years since the tenement house law went into effect from 18.74 to 14.11. To the average person that means little. Interpreted in terms of human life, however, it means that 20,700 lives have been saved which would otherwise have been lost. In Manhattan, where the oldest tenements and greatest congestion is found, the death rate has decreased from 19.39 to 14.99. New York now claims the best rate of any city in the world on infant mortality, 105 out of every 1,000. There is no question that much of this gain must be attributed to the better sanitary conditions brought about through ten years of enforcement of the present tenement house law.

This decrease in the death rate is even more remarkable when considered in connection with the problems caused by our large foreign population. New York is the second Italian city in the world, as a Russian town it is third, and it has half as many Hungarians as Budapest. The number of its Jewish people is nearly a million and a quarter. A million immigrants pass through Ellis Island each year mostly on their way to friends or relatives on the "East Side." The "old settlers"



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have been here only a few years. The new immigration must be rapidly assimilated and people of varying habits be taught to maintain sanitary standards. To the tidy American housekeeper Orchard or Hester Street seems picturesque but repulsively dirty; to the experienced sanitary inspector it is clean dirt and the disorder does not hold the menace to health of the old foul privy vaults, filthy stables and rubbish filled cellars.

The city through its Tenement House Department is bringing about permanent improvement; structural, letting in light and air; sanitary, giving adequate water supply, decent toilets and cleanliness throughout the house and in the yards and courts. The worst conditions in the older tenements have been done away with. Over 7,000 vile privies in the crowded, closely built-up sections of the city, each a dangerous centre of disease, have been completely removed, and new, modern, sanitary conveniences installed instead. The tuberculosis-breeding inside dark room is rapidly becoming a thing of the past. Over 200,000 rooms previously without any windows whatsoever, mere dark closets, have had windows cut into them letting in a little of the outside light and air.

The next problem is that of educating our citizens, native and foreign, to assume their responsibilities, to use and to care for the facilities provided, and to co-operate in the city housekeeping instead of acting like careless children. Judging by the progress made in improving housing conditions during the last decade it is not too much to expect that at the end of the next decade we will have as clean dwellings as the far-famed German cities. Especially is this prospect possible because of the rapid increase in the "new law" tenements. There is apparently no lack of money for investment in this profitable type of building; they are even to a limited extent replacing the oldest of the "old law" tenements.



THE EAST SIDE'S DEPARTMENT STORE.  
PICTURESQUE SIDEWALK TRADERS AND THEIR WARES.

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## WORK OF THE TENEMENT HOUSE DEPARTMENT

The statistics of the Tenement House Department show that 23,335 separate tenement houses, costing over 750 million dollars and containing 312,101 apartments, thus housing a MILLION AND A HALF PEOPLE have been erected in ten years under the new law. This means that a million and a half people live in homes with outside light and air in every room, with sink and running water within the apartment, with their own private water closet entirely within their own control; over a million of them have also their own private bath. All these and millions more have their lives protected in case of fire by fire escapes and in many buildings by fireproof stairs and halls as well.

The results achieved are so vast, and they have come in so short a time that the mind fails to grasp completely their full significance. One can with difficulty realize that nearly one-third of the city's entire population has in this short time been housed in homes which are comparatively safe and sanitary.

When the Tenement House Department was organized by Mr. deForest and Mr. Veiller immediately after the passage of the law in 1901, it was the first city department of its kind in the world. To it were given powers over tenement houses, formerly vested in the Health and Building Departments. It has in ten years firmly established itself as a necessary factor in the city government. In 1902 it had an appropriation of about \$400,000 and before the end of the first year the staff numbered about 385 employees. Today both the staff and the appropriation have doubled. For 1913 the appropriation was \$809,275 and the staff had grown to 770. Four-fifths of a million is spent each year to insure proper housing in a city of tenants.

At first the Department was violently opposed by landlords interested only in rent returns and by speculative builders intent on quick profits. Now it is recognized by owners, builders, architects, taxpayers and tenants as an intelligent and unprejudiced factor in the construction of new, and the im-

provement of old tenement houses; and as a constant and forceful factor in maintaining good sanitary conditions. Occasionally a disgruntled owner who has been compelled to comply with the same rules as his neighbor writes a letter to the newspapers, but almost one hundred per cent. of tenement house owners appreciate the benefits to property and tenants brought about by the impartial administration of the law, and are willing to co-operate in improving conditions.

Started with civil service employees the Department has always maintained a high standard in its dealings with the public.

New York City has successfully tried the experiment of establishing a department to deal with housing problems. It exists solely for the purpose of safeguarding the living conditions of the great mass of the people, and is quickly responsive to their needs. To this is largely due the great improvement in the sanitary condition of the city.

A striking tribute to the changed conditions which have come about in recent years is found in the comments of a recent visitor to our shores—Dr. Nemenyi of Budapest sent here by the Hungarian government to study America's methods of dealing with the housing problem. In a recent interview he said: "New York's tenement laws and their enforcement have no parallel anywhere in Europe. New York's handling of the tenement problem is, to European eyes, unique, admirable, impressive. Conditions in the worst of your tenements are vastly better than in the worst of Europe's. Your laws have produced this superiority."

After a four weeks' study of New York's tenements in all parts of the city, Dr. Nemenyi made this utterance and added:

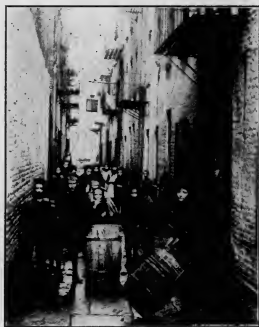
"The overshadowing feature of the New York tenement situation is the kind of laws you have and the way you force obedience to them."

"Your tenements as a whole are far better than those of Europe, while your slums are not nearly as bad as those of many cities in Europe. Of course there are tenement house and building laws in Hungary and Europe generally, but they are not

such laws as you have. They do not protect the health and lives of dwellers in the tenements as do yours, and it is for this reason that Hungary wishes to revise her laws along American lines."

After making due allowance for the complimentary attitude of the stranger within our gates, there is much that remains for which the community may be deeply thankful. One has but to think back to the days of Bone Alley, Gotham Court and Mulberry Bend to realize the great changes that have come.

For these results the movement for housing reform started by the Charity Organization Society fifteen years ago is largely responsible. It is due to that movement that we have the tenement house law of today. It is due to it that we have the Tenement House Department with its 800 employes and its \$800,000 per annum of city money devoted to the welfare of the tenement dweller.



HISTORIC "GOTHAM COURT."  
120 FAMILIES WERE QUARTERED ON THIS  
FILTHY LANE 9 FEET WIDE. DESTROYED  
IN 1896.

## THE TENEMENT HOUSE COMMITTEE

That we have these two important agencies today is due in a further sense to the watchfulness and effective work of the Tenement House Committee. Had it not stayed on guard through all these years there would have been little left of the tenement house law, and the Department might have become a mere political asylum for the shiftless and incompetent.

The Tenement House Committee of the Charity Organization Society has now been in the service of the community for about fifteen years, a number of its eighteen members having served continuously since it was formed. With the experience that time has brought, the broad outlook and balanced judgment which comes from meeting old problems in new aspects, and measuring new projects by the success or failure of former efforts of similar kind, the Committee has established itself in the opinion of the community as an authority on tenement house law, tendencies, possibilities, and reforms, and as a check on impracticable schemes. Its advice is asked by organizations and groups of citizens, and it is always ready to confer, advise or make suggestions. As the membership includes architects, builders, property owners, real estate managers, and lawyers, a consensus of opinion is secured after discussion which covers all sides of the question. Its task and purpose as originally stated was "to improve the condition of tenement houses by securing proper legislation, by securing the enforcement of the existing laws, and by encouraging the building of model tenements."

In 1913 its activities are summed up: "A special Committee of the Charity Organization Society, which seeks to improve the condition of the homes of the people in New York City by preventing the passage of legislation which will weaken the present tenement house law; by securing from time to time, as may be necessary, new legislation strengthening and improving the present requirements; by studying carefully the enforce-

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ment of the existing laws by the local authorities and stimulating them to more efficient administration, co-operating with the local officials wherever it is possible. In addition, it is the purpose of the Committee to study carefully present and future tendencies, especially in the outlying districts of the city, so as to safeguard these districts from the creation of the slums similar to those which exist in the more congested portions of the city; to formulate new remedies for existing conditions and secure their accomplishment, and to develop in all ways possible every practicable improvement in tenement house conditions."

Seven members of the Committee have served continuously since 1901 and thirteen since 1903. Mr. Robert W. deForest served in 1902-3 as the first Commissioner of the newly created Tenement House Department of the City of New York and Mr. Veiller as the first Deputy Commissioner. They instituted the entire system for the Department, and so effectually was this done that there have been few changes in methods during the ten years the Department has been in existence.



"NEW LAW" TENEMENT HOUSES.

A THIRD OF NEW YORK'S POPULATION LIVE IN LIGHT, SANITARY, FIRE PROTECTED HOUSES  
ERECTED SINCE 1901.

Tangible results of these years of watchfulness and work are not wanting. New York City houses all but a fraction of its five million citizens in what are defined legally as "tenements," i. e., houses containing three families or more. The "new-law" tenements house a million and a half people, giving them most of the essentials for good living; the "old-law" tenements have been made into decent dwelling places. No unfavorable legislation has weakened the law, but almost every year it has been strengthened as need arises. Some requirements considered too drastic by property owners have been carried to higher courts, but the law has almost invariably been sustained. The law and its enforcement are now so strongly entrenched that they have become a fixed part of our civic policy. The necessity of spending \$800,000 a year on supervision of our homes is no longer questioned. Together with the Health Department it helps make and keep Greater New York one of the healthiest cities in the world.



REAR VIEW OF "NEW LAW" TENEMENT HOUSES.

SHOWING THE LARGE LIGHT COURTS.

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### THE "GRIMMER CASE"

There was never a time when the necessity for the work of the Tenement House Committee was so forcibly illustrated as during the legislative session of 1912. Had not this Committee been on guard, the whole fabric of forty years' successful effort at housing reform would have been completely destroyed.

Out of a clear sky, in the middle of February, the Court of Appeals handed down a decision which at one blow swept away practically the entire structure of the tenement house law, and rendered ineffective the work of the Tenement House Department.

### WHAT IS A TENEMENT?

That court took the unexpected position that an "apartment house" was not a tenement house, "if each family had its separate kitchen, its own toilet conveniences, and a separate set bath tub," and was therefore not subject to the requirements of the tenement house law, but practically free from all regulation as to light, air, ventilation, cleanliness, occupancy and the rest.

How far reaching and revolutionary this decision was, becomes apparent upon a moment's reflection:

Every new-law tenement has its separate kitchen; its separate toilet conveniences are made compulsory by law; and in over 80 per cent. of them each family also has its "separate set bath-tub." Thus at least 80 per cent. of the city's new-law tenements, in which over a million and a half people live, would be at once withdrawn from the protection which the law affords; and similarly by slight changes, thousands of older houses could have been made to escape all legal regulation.

Moreover, the city in all its departments, and all land owners and builders, for more than forty years, had acted upon a different interpretation of the law and many millions of dollars had been expended in new buildings on the faith of such an interpretation.

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The case in which this opinion was rendered had been pending in the Courts for over nine years, and the question at issue was a comparatively simple one; it was an instance where a flagrant attempt had been made to evade the requirements of the tenement house law in erecting an apartment house which did not conform to the law's fundamental requirements, by calling the building an "apartment hotel." So manifest was this attempted evasion that the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court had, with an unanimous bench, rendered an opinion sustaining the law and the Tenement House Department at every point. The Court of Appeals reversed the judgment on the ground that at the time of the erection of this house the tenement house law did not apply to it because that law had not been effective to repeal a previous provision of the Building Code which sought to differentiate between an "apartment house" and a "tenement house."

Had this decision been permitted to stand, chaos would have resulted in the building world of New York City and the results of forty years' effort at housing reform would in a short time have gone for naught.

### HOW THE DEFECT WAS REMEDIED

The Tenement House Committee at once sprang into the breach. Immediately upon being informed of the decision, Mr. deForest, Mr. Veiller and Tenement House Commissioner Murphy were in active conference; and a plan of action was developed.

It was determined to do three things: Seek immediate amendment by the legislature of the tenement house law, so as to remedy the alleged defect in the law pointed out by the Court; seek a similar amendment by the Board of Aldermen of the definition of an "apartment house" in the Building Code, for a similar purpose; and, finally, urge the Court of Appeals to re-open the case and permit a re-argument of the questions involved, with permission to the Committee to intervene as *amicus curiae*. All these things were done.

Accordingly, with swiftness and despatch the plans were laid; the situation was presented to Governor Dix and he was asked to give an emergency message on the bill. Senator Wagner, the Democratic leader of the Senate, and the Republican leaders in the Assembly had the situation explained to them, and their co-operation was secured in carrying out the plan, with the result that within twenty-four hours after the bill had been introduced in the legislature, it had passed both Houses and awaited the Governor's signature.

Then ensued a peculiar chapter of accidents. The Speaker of the Assembly was not in Albany when the bill passed that House, having left for his home in St. Lawrence County, and the Governor's counsel held that the Governor could not act upon the bill until it had the Speaker's personal signature and that the signature of the Speaker *pro tem.* would not answer.

As the Speaker was snowed up in a railroad train at the time, it was impossible to reach him by special messenger. All that could be done was to wait with patience until the Speaker returned on Monday night.

This gave the enemies of tenement reform their opportunity. In the three days that elapsed between the passage of the bill and its signature by the Speaker they flooded the Governor and the political leaders with letters and telegrams protesting against the bill, claiming that it extended the powers of the Tenement House Department and imposed new and unheard of hardships upon realty; when all that it did was to keep things exactly where they had always been. Senator Wagner's doorstep was besieged literally by hundreds of tenement house landlords all day Sunday who made life a burden for him and every kind of political pressure was brought to bear upon him to recall the bill from the Governor's hands.

In the meantime, in response to the hundreds of letters which the landlords had showered upon the Governor, the Governor announced that he would grant five days further in which to receive briefs and memoranda upon the bill.

During these five days a battle royal waged. Every effort was made to get Senator Wagner to withdraw the bill, and the

defenders of the law on their part used every effort to prevent this. Thanks to the steadfastness of the Senator, the bill was not withdrawn.

Owing to the delay which ensued through the granting of five days for the filing of briefs, the Governor's office was flooded with letters and telegrams urging him to veto the bill. On the other hand, the friends of tenement house reform by the thousands sent similar letters to the Governor urging him to sign the bill. Finally, after ten days' delay, the bill received the Governor's signature, and the tenement house law was saved.

There has never been a time in the history of New York when housing reform faced a greater crisis.

#### OTHER MEASURES

Co-terminate with this effort in the legislature, a similar campaign was waged in the Board of Aldermen with regard to the amendment of the Building Code, proposed by the Committee to carry out the same purposes. Delegations by the hundreds waited upon the Aldermen and protested against the amendment. An attempt was made to show that the Tenement House Department was seeking through this amendment to greatly enlarge its jurisdiction and to impose upon landlords new and unheard of requirements, although all that was being done was to make legally plain that the tenement house law applied to apartment houses and flats, to which it had always applied ever since there had been a tenement house law, viz., for over forty years. When, however, the action of the Legislature had automatically corrected the situation, it was deemed unnecessary to press further the amendment to the Building Code.

The third plan that had been outlined was also followed, namely, the Court of Appeals was asked by the Corporation Counsel to permit a re-argument of the case in question and the Tenement House Committee filed a memorandum requesting permission to join in the re-argument, as *amicus curiæ*.

In this brief the attention of the Court was called to the far-

reaching effect of the decision. That it would apply primarily to 70,000 separate buildings in New York City; that it would nullify much of the tenement law as applied to nearly all the new-law tenements erected in the past ten years; that the decision overturned the well-established and settled practice of the State for over forty years past; that the definition of a tenement house and its application to all classes of multiple dwellings is of universal application and not limited to New York State; that "apartment houses," so called, needed regulation quite as much as tenement houses; that the Municipal Assembly of New York, in enacting the Building Code in 1899, had not intended to differentiate between apartment houses and tenement houses for purposes of legal regulation, as the Court evidently thought; that the provisions of the Building Code, a local ordinance, could not repeal the Greater New York Charter which dealt with this question of definition of tenement houses, even though the Court had held that they did repeal the provisions of the tenement house law; that it was not within the power of the Municipal Assembly to enact provisions affecting multiple dwellings included under the definition of tenement houses as laid down in the tenement house law, because of a direct prohibition by the Legislature of such ordinances, and any ordinance so enacted would be to that extent void; that the Court had apparently overlooked that a term might have one meaning in colloquial or popular use and another for purposes of legal regulation; that the assumption of the Court that there were but two classes of multiple dwellings, the apartment house and the tenement house, might have been true forty years ago, but was not true to-day, and that there were numerous varieties and classes of multiple dwellings in large cities known by different names colloquially and embraced generally under one of two broad generic classes of legal regulation, viz., either as tenement houses or hotels; that the following types might be enumerated: tenement houses, flats, French flats, apartment houses, bachelor apartments, studio apartments, kitchenette apartments, apartment hotels, hotels, family hotels, lodging houses, furnished-room houses, boarding houses, two-family houses, private dwellings;

that the practical effect of the decision would be to reduce the question of whether a multiple dwelling shall be subject to legal regulation or not, solely to the question of the presence or absence of "separate set bath tubs" for each family; that a novel feature was introduced by this decision, repugnant to democratic institutions and out of harmony with the practice of the courts hitherto, in the attempt to draw a line between the rich and the poor; that the Court, contrary to its usual practice, had apparently given little consideration to the intent of the legislature and the commission upon whose report the tenement house law was enacted.

Notwithstanding this comprehensive presentation of the facts and of the legal questions involved, the Court of Appeals subsequently handed down a second decision declining to permit a re-argument of the case on the ground that the questions presented in this memorandum had not been before them in the original case, and later suggesting that if a new case were brought the Court would be glad to entertain its consideration. The prompt action of the Governor and Legislature, however, made it unnecessary to adopt this suggestion of the Court.

There the case stands. The building in question, curiously enough, is still just as illegal as it was before, because under the decision it must comply with the light and ventilation provisions of the Building Code relating to apartment houses. This it does not do and can not be made to do without substantial reconstruction. The building is occupied as it has always been occupied ever since it was illegally built. What will happen to it ultimately is hard to say.

The whole matter has its lesson for those interested in housing reform. It points conclusively to the vital importance of the most carefully drawn and precisely worded statutes regulating tenement houses. Notwithstanding the careful manner in which the New York law was drawn, notwithstanding that it had stood successfully the tests of numerous actions in forty years past, the whole work was invalidated through this one decision of one court.

## LEGISLATIVE WORK

The tenement house law as formulated and passed in 1901 has stood the test of practical administration exceedingly well. The fundamentals involved have never been modified, although changes in phrasing or detail have been made. It has also been found necessary from time to time to insert new provisions, as the type of tenement house has changed with the increased skill



TENEMENT HOUSES BUILT AS  
SEPARATE UNITS ON LOTS 25  
FEET BY 100 FEET.

NARROW, DEEP BUILDINGS, DIFFICULT TO PLAN.

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Another notable development has been that of the fireproof apartment house usually located on a wide street. It often covers a half or whole block, and generally rises to ten or twelve stories, and one has even reached the height of seventeen stories. The rentals in these superior multiple-dwellings range from \$3,000 to \$25,000 per apartment per year.

Because of these changes in types of buildings that have been going on and to make the law keep pace with the changed

conditions, various amendments suggested by the Committee and by the Tenement House Department jointly have from time to time been actively promoted and passed by various legislatures.



TENEMENT HOUSES WITH 50-FOOT FRONTAGE.

THE LARGER UNIT GIVES GREATER FREEDOM AND ECONOMY IN PLANNING AND CONSTRUCTION.

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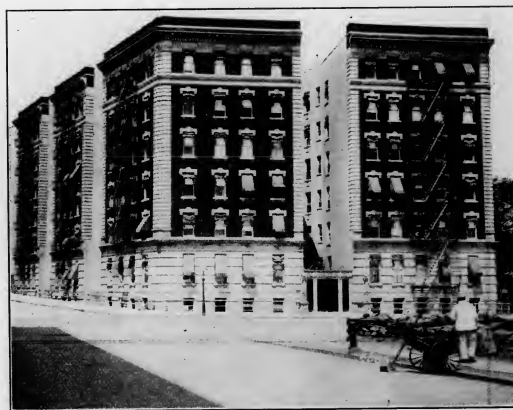
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### THE DEFINITION CHANGED

One of the most important changes in the definition of a tenement house was made necessary in 1911 by an evasion of the law that had been attempted by a clever architect in Brooklyn. The law had for over thirty years applied to all houses occupied by three families or more using the public halls, the yards and other parts of the building in common. This architect, who was building a three-family tenement house, with one family on the ground floor back of the store, and one family on each of the two upper floors, in order to avoid compliance with the law claimed that his house was not a tenement house. He argued that the three families did not use the public halls or any other parts of the building in common, and that such common use was confined to only the two families on the upper floors, as he had arranged the apartment of the family on the ground floor back of the store so that they had no access to the public hall or yard or cellar or the water-closet or any of the other features mentioned in the law.

It is rather extraordinary that no one during the past thirty years had heretofore thought of this method of "beating" the law. The method certainly was an effective one, as the architect's contention from a legal point of view was entirely sound.

Through eliminating the "common use" provisions in the definition and making it apply to all houses occupied by three families or more doing their cooking upon the premises, this defect in the law has been remedied.

The definition formerly read:

"A 'tenement house' is any house or building, or portion thereof, which is rented, leased, let or hired out, to be occupied, or is occupied as the home or residence of three families or more living independently of each other, and doing their cooking upon the premises, or by more than two families upon any floor, so living and cooking, but having a common right in the halls, stairways, yards, water-closets or privies, or some of them."

As amended it now reads:

"A 'tenement house' is any house or building, or portion thereof, which is either rented, leased, let or hired out, to be occupied, or is occupied, in whole or in part, as the home or residence of three families or more living independently of each other, and doing their cooking upon the premises, and includes apartment houses, flat houses and all other houses so occupied."

### PROVISIONS FOR FIRE PROTECTION

On the constructive side, the Committee has joined each year with Tenement House Commissioner Murphy in preparing and securing the passage by the legislature of measures that greatly increase the safety of the dweller in multiple buildings.

Heretofore people living in *fireproof* apartment houses as well as in ordinary tenements were dependent for escape from the building upon a single flight of stairs, as the laws did not require fire escapes upon such buildings. With the erection of buildings of this kind to great heights, a seventeen-story apartment house having recently been built, and the



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Another important change in the law, and one which the Committee has been patiently biding its time for the past ten years to bring about, is that which forbids in the future the use of certain rope ladder or wire cable fire escapes upon the smaller tenement houses, requiring instead in every case, outside fire escape balconies with connecting outside stairs, the only type of fire escape that is really adequate.

Another amendment legalized the erection of fire escapes in a recess in the front of the building on new tenements—a form of construction that it is desirable to encourage, as fire escapes on the front of a building take away much from the attractiveness of the better class of flats and apartment houses.

The bill also required that every flight of stairs in new tenement houses shall extend from the entrance floor to the roof. Previously it was only necessary to have one flight of stairs thus extended.



A ROPE LADDER FIRE ESCAPE. ATTACHED AT TOP OF WINDOW-SILL, SWINGING LOOSE AT BOTTOM; MAKING IT AN ATHLETIC FEAT TO DESCEND.

In a similar way provision was made to affect a new type of apartment house, namely, the so-called "duplex" apartment, in which certain evils had arisen which it had not been possible to foresee. A number of these houses had been built in recent years. The "duplex" apartment is one which occupies a portion of two separate floors of an apartment house. On one of the floors are to be found the living rooms, parlor, study, dining room, kitchen, etc.; on the other floor are to be found the bedrooms. It developed in the course of practice that these houses were being built in such a way that in case of fire the tenants had no means of escape from the bedrooms, except by going down the stairs from their upper floor to the living rooms on the lower floor and proceeding thence to the public hall or fire escapes. It is obvious that this was a dangerous mode of construction. This has now been corrected and the tenants of such houses built in the future will have direct access at *each* floor of their apartment to a proper means of egress.

A further important change in the law was one which required in new tenements the separation of the elevator shafts from the stairs and halls by means of brick walls or fireproof partitions. Hitherto the practice had been to build the elevator shafts generally in the wellhole of the stairs. This practice had by no means been confined to tenement houses but prevailed in hotels, offices, lofts, and other buildings.

The fire in the Equitable Building in 1912 showed for the first time in a dramatic way of the great danger of this form of construction and called attention to the fact that the elevator shaft with its oiled track afforded an extraordinary means for the quick spread of fire throughout a building.

This change in the tenement house law marks a distinct advance in building construction and affords to the dweller in new tenement houses a greatly increased degree of protection.

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windows in the halls of new tenements shall be fireproof and shall be glazed with wire-glass, even though such windows open directly upon the street. The effect of this will be to minimize the danger of the spread of fire from floor to floor through the outside windows of the building.

Provision was also made specifically so as to remove any doubt as to the legality of open stairs in future buildings; also strengthening the law so as to prohibit in fireproof as well as in non-fireproof buildings any openings whatever from the public halls to the apartments, except of course the necessary door-openings.

Another advance made was to require public halls of an undue length to be built fireproof. The law had always required the stair halls to be built fireproof and to be shut off from any non-fireproof public hall, but public halls had not been required to have these precautions taken until the present time.

The law was again strengthened by requiring the partitions separating one apartment from another or from the public halls of the building to be provided with certain means of fire stops.

Another advance in the law was that by which inside cellar stairs, permitted in the smaller buildings, were required to be enclosed with brick walls and provided with self-closing fireproof doors at all openings.

Another step in advance was to require windows on the lot line, when they are supplementary to those required by law, to be entirely fireproof, with metal frames and wire glass, thus reducing the danger of the spread of fire from the outside of the building.

#### THE VENT SHAFT ELIMINATED

An important change in the law was the elimination of the "vent shaft" in 1912. When the tenement house law was originally prepared in 1901 it was planned to do away entirely with all the small shafts that had been in vogue for purposes of light and ventilation.

In the deliberations of the Commission, however, it was pointed out that there were cases where builders of high-class elevator apartments were providing five or six baths for each apartment and where it would really work hardship and involve material sacrifice of space to require that each one of these bath rooms should have a window opening directly to the outer air, namely, the street, the yard, or a large court, and that as in such houses bath rooms would be maintained always in a sanitary condition and would be lighted with electric light it was desirable to permit some other method of lighting and ventilating than that proposed. Accordingly the Commission made provision in the law for the use of vent shafts, which were to be used solely for the lighting and ventilation of water closet apartments and bath rooms. These shafts were to be of a minimum size of 20 square feet and were required to have intakes of air at the bottom. It was never contemplated that such vent shafts should be used as a means of lighting and ventilating the water closets of ordinary tenement houses but only as a means of providing light and ventilation for supplementary bath rooms in high class apartments.

During the eleven years in which this provision has been in operation there have been practically no cases until within the last year or two where these vent shafts have been utilized. Recently, however, this method of lighting and ventilating water closets has been availed of in a few cases in connection with tenement houses and the evils of this form of construction have been made manifest. It was accordingly determined by Commissioner Murphy and by the Tenement House Committee that the time had come when the vent shaft should be abolished. Accordingly, in the "departmental bill," introduced in 1912, an amendment to this effect was included and vent shafts can no longer be constructed in future tenement houses. Provision, however, has been made for the ventilation of supplementary bath rooms in high class, fireproof, elevator apartment houses by means of vent flues extending *separately* to the outer air, but these vent flues are permitted only where the bath rooms in question are lighted by electric light and are supple-

mental to the water closets and bath rooms required by law. Nor is this method of ventilation permitted in the case of servants' bath rooms.

It is believed that with these changes the law has now been placed upon a satisfactory basis with respect to supplementary toilets and that the evils of the vent shaft have been completely eliminated.

Similarly it was found in 1912 that owing to defective phraseology, it had been possible for owners of three-family houses to turn out one family, thus converting their buildings into two-family houses and withdrawing them from the operation of the law, and then later on putting back another family and making them three-family houses again; owing to the phraseology of the law, such houses under these circumstances did not become tenement houses. This defect has been cleared up.

Experience has shown that in some portions of the city the practice had developed of moving a tenement house from one lot to another. This, of course, was not desirable, as the old building should under those circumstances be outlawed. The law, accordingly, was changed so as to bring such buildings under the requirements for new buildings, thus preventing this method of evasion.

#### FIREPROOF ELEVATOR APARTMENT HOUSES

During the session of 1912 the attention of the Committee was called by a group of persons interested in the building of high class fireproof elevator apartment houses to certain features of the law which these gentlemen believed worked unnecessary hardship to builders and investors without compensating advantages to the community, and strong representations were made to the Committee urging them to support legislation which would differentiate the so-called tenement house from the so-called apartment house.

The Committee realized, however, from their long study of this question that no legislation of this kind was practicable without defeating the entire purposes of the tenement house

law; that no line of *legal* differentiation could be drawn which would not permit easy evasion of its requirements, and that if such differentiation were made, all buildings erected in the future would be "apartment houses" and would escape adequate legal regulation.

The Committee accordingly requested those concerned to point out specific provisions of the law which worked hardship to the class of realty in which they were interested, so as to see whether a change in the law could not be made which would do away with these hardships.

As a result of several conferences held between representatives of the Committee, Tenement House Commissioner Murphy and this group, an amendatory bill was prepared seeking to overcome the difficulties complained of, and was incorporated in the general amendatory bill of the Department. These amendments as a whole mark a distinct advance in the law and in no respect remove any of the protection which has hitherto been thrown around the tenement dweller. They relate almost entirely to fireproof elevator apartment houses.

#### TOWER FIRE ESCAPES

Permission was given for the first time to utilize a tower fire-escape as a means of egress from such buildings. This means of egress has for many years been considered by fire experts as one of the best types of fire escapes. Under the requirements of the law such fire towers had been classified as public halls and were subject to requirements that militated against their construction. The amendment removed this handicap.

#### ELEVATOR VESTIBULES

At the same time provision was made for a new feature in apartment-house construction, namely, the elevator vestibule. In elevator apartment houses a plan has been developed in recent years of having the passenger elevators open directly into a small vestibule serving two apartments, the stairs being located in

another portion of the building entirely removed from the elevators, a form of construction very desirable to encourage. Under the provisions of the tenement house law, however, this elevator vestibule was technically a public hall because it served two families, and therefore had to be lighted and ventilated directly to the outer air, a form of construction which was impracticable without too great a sacrifice of space. The law, therefore, has been changed so as to permit such an elevator vestibule in future apartment houses. Every safeguard, however, has been taken. They must be built fireproof and, be properly ventilated and lighted by means of artificial light.

#### PENT-HOUSES AND ROOF GARDENS

Another change in the law made at the same time permitted the construction upon the roofs of high class apartment houses of a pent-house or small structure to be utilized for extra servants' bedrooms or for laundry purposes or janitor's quarters. Most high class apartments have found the necessity of such supplementary space, but heretofore there has been no means of providing it except in the cellar, which was not satisfactory; an obstacle having existed in the fact that such a pent-house was deemed an extra story and brought the building beyond the limit of height laid down in the law.

In a similar way the law was changed to permit the roof garden treatment of all tenement houses erected in the future and to permit the construction of open pergolas and other ornamental treatment of roof gardens or roof playgrounds without having these features count as extra height of the building.

This summarizes the more important features of the changes made in the law relating to apartment houses which the persons interested in this class of realty were desirous of having made.

In addition to these amendments some difficulties which had been encountered in practice in dealing with some of the technical aspects of the law have been remedied and criticism and opposition to the law in certain sections of the city, espe-

cially The Bronx, have been removed. These amendments covered short lots, peculiarly shaped lots, lots with difference in grade, and retaining walls, all of which furnish basis for divergence in opinion.

#### PROSTITUTION IN TENEMENTS

The sections of the tenement house law dealing with prostitution were framed with the intention of placing great responsibility upon the owner. A penalty of \$1,000 is provided, which becomes a lien upon the property, if a tenement house or any part of it is used for purposes of prostitution with permission of the owner or his agent. Punishment by imprisonment in the workhouse for a term of six months was provided as a penalty for the woman convicted of this evil.

Last year, amendments suggested by the Committee of Fourteen and endorsed by the Tenement House Department and by the Tenement House Committee materially strengthened these sections, placing still more responsibility on owners. The law was also amended to make a "person" instead of a "woman" who solicits or commits prostitution a vagrant, making possible the arrest and sentence to six months in the workhouse of keepers, solicitors, madams, cadets, etc.; and to include solicitation to enter the halls, yards, rooms or any part of a tenement house. It also makes the agent responsible as well as the owner and lessee. Two or more convictions in six months are made presumptive evidence of permission on the part of the owner. It is believed that these amendments will materially assist the authorities in preventing the spread of prostitution in tenements.

#### OBJECTIONABLE BILLS

In addition to securing the passage of these important constructive legislative measures, the resources of the Committee are taxed each year to oppose and defeat objectionable bills introduced in the legislature. These bills come chiefly from

landlords and builders chronically opposed to the tenement house law and the administration of the Department. One of these was a measure which the Committee has had to oppose for practically every session of the legislature since the law was enacted eleven years ago, namely, a bill from the slum landlords seeking to legalize many dark, unventilated interior rooms in the old houses. One bill sought to legalize a tenement in Brooklyn illegally erected with a small yard; another made mandatory upon the Commissioner the vacation of any tenement house upon report of an inspector of unsanitary conditions or lack of light and ventilation. Under the present law this authority is permissive and not compulsory. Another bill gave permission to convert buildings less than four stories into tenements without complying with the provisions for new buildings. Another bill provided that no dog shall be kept in a tenement house or on the same lot.

A bill providing for the establishment of a branch office of the Tenement House Department in Queens was withdrawn after consultation with the Commissioner and an agreement reached to establish an office for the convenience of Queens Borough.

### THREE-FAMILY HOUSES

For thirty-four years, 1879 to 1913, all houses occupied by three or more families have been defined as tenement houses and have had the protection of tenement house laws. Of the 80,000 tenements found in the greater city in 1900, when the present law was being formulated by the Tenement House Commission 22,000 were three-family houses. That is, 66,000 families, 330,000 people lived in three-family houses mostly in the sparsely built up districts of Brooklyn and The Bronx.

While it was thought desirable to encourage this kind of housing, the Commission felt that the tenants should have all of the benefits sought for the larger houses—wide courts permitting light and ventilation for every room, individual water supply and toilets inside of each apartment, and adequate fire protection.

Hardly had the law of 1902 been passed when it became necessary for the Tenement House Committee to defend it from amendments proposed by speculative builders and dealers in builders' materials. Among other changes they desired to secure a reduction in the size of the courts provided for the proper light and ventilation of new houses, and to return practically to the narrow, dark, unventilated airshaft, three feet by twelve, which had been so emphatically condemned by the Tenement House Commission and which the law prohibited.

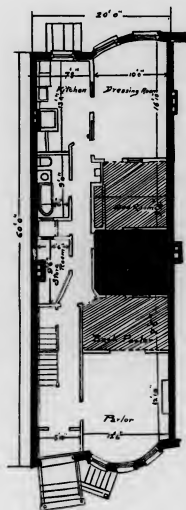
In 1903, an amendatory bill was passed which had been presented with the approval of the Tenement House Department and the Tenement House Committee. The amendments were based upon the experience of the Department, and were made after full and free conference with citizens affected by the law, both as tenants and owners. It was the purpose of the amendments to adjust the law, so far as was consistent with its fundamental purpose, to building conditions, particularly in Brooklyn and the outlying boroughs, in such a way as to encourage the construction of small tenements at low rentals.

Notwithstanding these concessions and the lower standards thus made possible for the smaller buildings, builders and owners, at almost every session of the legislature since 1904, have had

bills introduced to exempt three-family houses from the operation of the law, which if passed would have meant the taking away of the protection for this class of houses which they have had since 1879—a long step backward.

At the legislative session of 1913 the Committee led the opposition to this plan so effectively with the active co-operation of the Brooklyn Tenement House Committee and Tenement House Commissioner Murphy that not only did the bill fail to be reported out of Committee but its sponsor in the Assembly repudiated it on the floor of the House, saying that he had been misled and misinformed as to its purposes, and would have nothing further to do with it.

The movement last year, while seeming to be better organized and to have more support behind it than in previous years, came chiefly from Brooklyn, and was confined to a few real estate, building and building material interests. It had no general support. Three classes of interests appeared to be behind it: certain owners who hoped in this way to escape the expense of making their illegally built houses comply with the law, owners of old private dwellings who wished to alter their buildings



TYPICAL FLOOR PLAN OF TWO-FAMILY HOUSE PERMITTED BY NEW YORK BUILDING CODE.

THREE INTERIOR ROOMS WITH NO WINDOWS TO OUTER AIR. IF THREE-FAMILY HOUSES WERE REMOVED FROM CONTROL OF TENEMENT HOUSE LAW THEY COULD BE BUILT ON A SIMILAR PLAN.

into tenement houses but who find the requirement for light rooms an obstacle, and finally some speculative builders who saw more profit and better sales for three-family houses than for two-family ones, and who wanted to be free to build as they please, and especially to escape from the requirements which forbids dark rooms in future tenement houses. The fact that the market had recently been glutted with two-family houses served to emphasize the situation.

As the city of Chicago has now for ten years past made its tenement laws apply not only to three-family houses, but to two-family houses as well, it is hardly to be expected that New York City should contemplate seriously a backward step of this kind. If any change is to be made in this direction, it should be to bring two-family houses within the law. But there is still an interested opposition, especially in the outlying boroughs, which may be expected to continue to seek in the legislature further "relief" of this kind.

## WATER-CLOSETS-ON-STAIRS

An active campaign has been necessary to prevent the passage of an amendment to the law which it was felt would mark a distinct backward step. A small group of Manhattan owners sought to amend the law to permit the erection of a type of tenement in which they were interested. This type embodied a modified form of the well known "open stairs" originally built by Mr. Alfred T. White in 1890. The sponsors of the plan sought to make it appear that it was to this feature that the Tenement House Committee objected. The Committee's real objection, however, was to windows on these so-called "open stairs" as the sole means of light and ventilation for four water-closets on each stair landing, practically a return to the old type of objectionable hall water closet with insufficient light and consequent uncleanness. The same group of tenement owners also sought to change the law and make the minimum



*By Permission of the New York Medical Journal.*

"WATER-CLOSET-ON-THE-STAIRS."

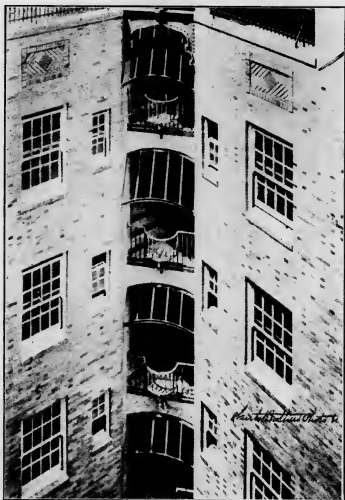
THE TOILET WINDOWS ARE AT THE BACK OF THE HALL, 10 FEET FROM THE LIGHT.

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All of these measures were opposed by the Committee both at public meetings in the city and before the Legislature at Albany. This was made difficult because of the high standing of some of the supporters of the measures who through misinformation thought they were supporting an amendment that would permit "open stairs," and did not fully realize the detrimental features of water-closets-on-the-stairs and of narrow rooms. The bills introduced in the Legislature were not reported out of Committee.

## WATER-CLOSETS-ON-STAIRS

An active campaign has been necessary to prevent the passage of an amendment to the law which it was felt would mark a distinct backward step. A small group of Manhattan owners sought to amend the law to permit the erection of a type of tenement in which they were interested. This type embodied a modified form of the well known "open stairs" originally built by Mr. Alfred T. White in 1890. The sponsors of the plan sought to make it appear that it was to this feature that the Tenement House Committee objected. The Committee's real objection, however, was to windows on these so-called "open stairs" as the sole means of light and ventilation for four water-closets on each stair landing, practically a return to the old type of objectionable hall water closet with insufficient light and consequent uncleanness. The same group of tenement owners also sought to change the law and make the minimum



By Permission of the New York Medical Journal.

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## TAXATION

A number of bills affecting taxation, most of them involving "single tax," have been introduced in recent sessions of the legislature. All have failed of passage. One of the most persistent is a bill proposing a change in the system of taxation so as to make the tax on land twice as great as the tax on buildings. The bill originated with the Committee on Congestion of Population. Careful consideration was given to this measure by the Tenement House Committee which came to the conclusion that if the bill had any effect on the problem of congestion, its effect would be to increase rather than diminish it. The Committee took no active part in the campaign against the bill, satisfying its sense of obligation to the community by pointing out to the legislature the Committee's views with regard to its possible effects. The bill was strongly opposed by real estate interests and did not pass.

## CORRELATED LEGISLATION

It is with great satisfaction that pioneers in housing reform note the advances made possible by social laws dealing with life, work, fire safety, and sanitary conditions in tenement houses. The tenement house law seeks to regulate only housing conditions, constructive and sanitary. Other laws must deal with the tenants and their mode of life.

A comprehensive housing law for second class cities in the State of New York covering not only tenement houses but all kinds of dwelling places, was passed at the session of 1913. It marks the greatest advance that has been made in housing reform in America in 10 years, and will protect Albany, Troy, Syracuse, Schenectady, Utica and Yonkers from many of the housing evils with which New York City has had to contend.

Three bills of general interest were passed last year; two became laws, one the Home Rule bill, giving extended powers to local governments, another authorizing cities and incorporated villages to appoint and appropriate for a city planning commission; the third a bill providing for excess condemnation of land.

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Two of the laws passed as a result of the work of the State Factory Commission will be of great value as their enforcement becomes general. Through one law, sanitary conditions as to labor, materials, and surroundings in cellar bakeries will be greatly improved. The establishment of new cellar bakeries is prohibited. These cellar bakeries have always been a prolific source of bad conditions through fire dangers and uncleanli-



*By Permission National Child Labor Committee.*

## HOME WORK IN A TENEMENT. LOW WAGES AND LONG HOURS.

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It is interesting to note the large number of bills introduced each year in the legislature which affect housing conditions, although they may not directly amend the tenement house law. For this reason close scrutiny of all bills dealing with subjects in any way allied to housing is necessary. For instance, a bill

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dealing with fire prevention in factories may have an apparently harmless clause directly and unintentionally conflicting with the clauses of the tenement house law dealing with fire protection.

### THREE YEARS SUMMARY OF LEGISLATIVE WORK

To sum up: During the three-year period under review fifty-five different bills seeking to weaken the tenement house law in some important respect have been introduced in the Legislature and have had to have the constant scrutiny and attention of the Committee. Because of this watchfulness and the opposition made manifest to such measures, none of these bills has ever been passed nor more than five of them even been reported favorably by the legislative committees. Had not the Tenement House Committee been on guard it is fair to assume that many of these measures would have been passed and become laws, to the great detriment of the living conditions of the people of this city.

In 1911 eight bills were introduced in the Senate directly amending the tenement house law or the charter provisions dealing with the Tenement House Department. None of them were passed. A bill to permit the erection of tenement houses in which the water-closets would open on public stairways was defeated by an active campaign. Three charter revision bills which were introduced required careful watching to see that the provisions for the Tenement House Department were not weakened. Four bills dealing with fire prevention contained provisions which would have taken away supervision of fire escapes from the Tenement House Department. They were amended to except tenement houses. Five general bills including one for a commission on distribution of population, another a commission to investigate manufacturing in tenements were approved by the Tenement House Committee but did not pass.

Fifteen of these twenty bills were also introduced in the Assembly, requiring constant watching. In addition an Assembly bill was introduced amending the tenement house law to legalize certain kinds of dark rooms, which necessitated a

vigorous campaign before it was defeated. Two other Assembly bills dealt with fire protection and the lien law.

A general bill amending the tenement house law was drawn by and introduced with the approval of the Tenement House Department and the Tenement House Committee. After passing both houses it was recalled from the Governor, and thus failed to become effective until it was again introduced and passed in 1912. During 1911 a total of forty-four bills required constant watching.

During the legislative session of 1912, twenty-nine bills were under observation. Of these seven in the Senate, and ten in the Assembly, directly amended the tenement house law. The chief interest was in two bills approved and forwarded by the Tenement House Committee and the Tenement House Department. The fight for the passage of the definition bill (Grimmer Case) is told elsewhere in the report. In addition a bill generally amending the tenement house law was passed and went into effect.

Two bills were vigorously opposed; one a bill to take three-family houses from the tenement house law; another to legalize a tenement with inadequate yard, where a fraudulent statement had been made to the Tenement House Department. In the Assembly the oft-introduced bill to legalize certain kinds of dark rooms was again defeated.

In 1913, thirty-one bills were of concern to the Tenement House Committee. Ten bills directly amended the tenement house law. Three bills defeated in 1912 dealing with three-family houses, water-closets on stairs, and an illegal yard were again introduced and defeated.

A general amendment covering necessary changes was drawn up by the Tenement House Committee and the Tenement House Department and became a part of the law.

Of special note were the bills passed at this session as a result of investigations of the Factory Investigation Commission. Indirectly several of them affected housing conditions, notably the one prohibiting cellar bakeries in the future, and the one prohibiting certain kinds of manufacturing in tenements.

## HEIGHT OF BUILDINGS

An important development of the year has been the appointment by the Board of Estimate of a Committee to consider the regulation of the height of buildings, with President McAneny as Chairman. This Committee has in turn appointed an Advisory Commission to study the subject and report\* its findings to the Board of Estimate. The Tenement House Committee took an active part in common with a number of other organizations in bringing about the appointment of this committee and two of its members are serving on the Advisory Commission. It is hoped that as a result of this Committee's work the present absurd situation by which isolated five-story tenements are erected in the midst of farming land will be brought to an end, and that the height of buildings will be regulated on a different basis in different parts of the city, and the evils of overcrowding, high buildings and congested streets be prevented in these as yet comparatively undeveloped communities.

The evils of "borrowed" light and ventilation have been so forcibly demonstrated in the towering buildings of lower Manhattan that there is an increasing general demand for some kind of regulation. Local real estate associations, building engineers, even property owners, recognize that rental values are materially affected by lack of proper natural light. The community is gradually learning that its workers have a right to as good conditions in offices, lofts, factories and stores, as the tenement

\*Since this report was written the report of the Advisory Commission on Height of Buildings has been made. It recommends a general limitation to twice the width of the street, with permission for towers, and set-back of one foot of each two feet on stories above that limit. An amendment to the charter is suggested giving the Board of Estimate power to divide the city into districts of varying number, shape, and area. Uniform regulations for height, bulk and open spaces are to prevail throughout each separate district as established. These limitations shall be designed to secure safety from fire, promote public health and convenience, provide adequate light and air through open spaces, and make access convenient. The Board may also designate industrial and residential districts providing regulations suitable to each district so that the evils now so manifest in lower Manhattan will not be repeated in the outlying boroughs.

house law guarantees to them in their homes. It is also felt that the outlying boroughs should not be built up with the six to seventeen story tenement houses characteristic of Manhattan Island. While land values already seem to preclude the ideal of the detached one-family house with its own yard, it is possible that districts devoted to residential purposes can be developed with restrictions which will discourage the building of huge multiple dwellings in the open fields.

This feeling for restriction of building is crystallizing into bills before the legislature, active propaganda work in various citizens' organizations, and a general demand that "something be done."

The restriction of the height of one class of building set and maintained since 1901 by the tenement house law has furnished a firmly established precedent for the discussions of

limitation of the height of all other classes of buildings. No one has ever questioned the provisions by which a tenement house is restricted to one and a half times the width of the street on which it stands. It is clear that if the community can do



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this, it has the right to make reasonable restrictions for all buildings, and that the pioneer work done by the tenement house law can be followed up by the passage and enforcement of other laws. The extent of "police power" has never been tested, but the hearty support given the Advisory Commission by real estate dealers, property interests, newspapers, and the community at large is indicative that an advance at this time will not meet the opposition with which the tenement house commission had to contend twelve years ago.

The Committee has also considered the subject of further restrictions of the height of tenements. The law sets a limit of one and a half times the width of the street on which the building faces. Tenements now under construction range from twelve to fifteen stories and while they must be constructed fireproof throughout, it is a question whether they should be allowed to go to so great a height. The opinion of the Committee is that further regulations might well be included in the general plan for limiting the height of all buildings.

## PROPOSED BUILDING CODE

There have been the usual periodical attempts to revise the Building Code. A promising effort was made in 1912 when a proposed code was prepared by a Joint Committee of architects, building trade employers, representatives of the fire underwriters, engineers and dealers in building materials. Upon examination it was found that many of the provisions of this code would have been in serious conflict with the tenement house law. The Committee accordingly submitted to the Board of Aldermen a recommendation that if the code were to be adopted there should be embodied a general provision making it plain that the code did not in any respect conflict with the provisions of that law but that in all cases where there was conflict, the latter should govern. This suggestion was accepted. The code itself, however, failed to pass the Board of Aldermen. It was, however, used as a basis for another attempt at revision by the Building Committee of the Board, some six months later, with an Advisory Committee composed of the Superintendents of Buildings and representatives of various interests. This revision also failed to pass the Board of Aldermen.

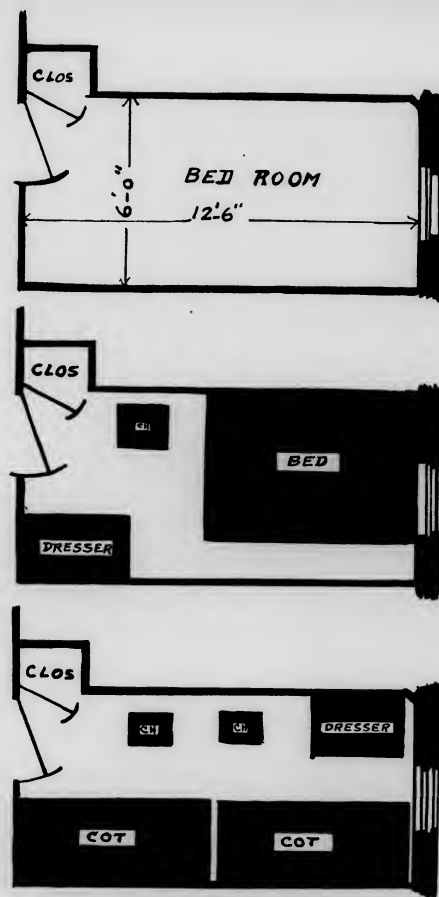
While both of these codes embodied genuine advances in building construction, they did not give sufficient consideration to principles necessary to better sanitary conditions. The provisions dealing with light and ventilation were so inadequate that objection was made to them by the Committee on the Prevention of Tuberculosis and the Tenement House Committee. The ten years enforcement of the tenement house law has demonstrated among other things the practicability of requiring owners to leave open spaces of sufficient size on each lot, in the form of yards and courts, to provide proper light and ventilation for each building upon its own lot. Light and ventilation which is "borrowed" from an adjoining lower building or a vacant lot will eventually be shut off by the erection of subsequent buildings.

Both of these rejected building codes permitted the construction of windowless rooms in one and two family houses under the guise of alcove rooms. New York needs no further experiences in dark rooms. The Tenement House Department has removed 200,000 from tenement houses at considerable expense to owners, and there is no question that a windowless room is as dangerous in a two-family house, a factory, or a hotel, as in a tenement house.

The only satisfactory method is to require all rooms to get adequate light and air in every part from a proper open space. There is no objection to the alcove treatment of rooms, but the portion thus treated should have its independent means of light and ventilation and no building should "borrow" light from adjoining property.

#### SEVEN FOOT ROOMS

A housing law differs from a building code in that it deals with living conditions as well as construction problems. The tenement house law provides not only fire protection and good plumbing but guards family life by controlling the minimum size of rooms and the privacy of the family. When the law was passed provision was made that one room in each apartment should contain at least 120 square feet and that no room should have a floor area of less than 70 square feet. It was felt that this minimum room would approximate 7 by 10 feet and while giving minimum requirements would still allow a convenient arrangement of furniture. It was discovered, however, that some architects in their desire to "squeeze all they could out of the plan" were planning tenements with bedrooms 5 feet wide and 14 feet long, and that a few other architects were planning high class apartment houses with similar narrow bedrooms for the servants. Accordingly the Committee joined with Tenement House Commissioner Murphy in 1912 in urging upon the legislature an amendment that would prohibit in future buildings any room less than 7 feet wide. Before taking this action, a study was made to determine whether such a standard would work hardship or whether it would merely stop a bad tendency.



A SIX-FOOT ROOM.  
SHOWING THE LACK OF OPEN SPACE WHEN FURNITURE IS IN PLACE.

Of the 18,243 rooms involved in the study none was found which was less than 6 feet wide. Less than two per cent. of the rooms were less than 7 feet wide and 81 per cent. were over 8 feet wide, indicating that rooms as small as the minimum floor area of 70 square feet provided for in the law are not as yet common in the outlying boroughs.

The question of the adequate size of rooms is one that can not be properly determined by a study of the plans alone. A room 70 square feet in area seems a fair sized room when viewed on the plans. But the same room when considered with the furniture in it is a very different thing. When a wardrobe has been provided, taking six square feet of floor space, and there are added a double bed, a table, chair, bureau and per-

haps washstand and trunk, the space left is seen to be hardly adequate. It would seem that it should be unnecessary to prescribe a minimum width of room and regulate this by statute. But just as it has been found necessary to prescribe in minute detail each minimum dimension of courts and other open spaces in order to insure adequate light and air, so experience has forced upon us, for similar reasons, the necessity of prescribing the minimum dimensions of rooms in our crowded tenement houses where land values are high and literally every inch of rentable space has its value. The Committee is gratified that it has been able to take this matter in time and stop the tendency before the bad practice became too firmly established.



A DOUBLE-DECKER BED.  
A FAVORITE SOLUTION OF THE  
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## SMALL HOUSES FOR WORKINGMEN

A study of the possibility of building small houses for workingmen inside the city limits instead of dooming the entire population to tenement house life has been completed, and the results of this inquiry are now being considered by the Committee with a view to determining what practical result may be the outcome of it.

## LECTURES

The Secretary is constantly responding to requests for formal lectures or informal talks from schools, clubs, colleges, social workers, church societies, neighborhood associations and civic improvement movements. The Director has appeared before the Factory Investigation Commission regarding home work in tenements, the Building Committee of the Board of Aldermen on the various proposed building codes, the Fifth Avenue Association on the regulation of the height of buildings, the National Housing Association in two conferences. The Director is also a member of the Advisory Commission on the Height of Buildings and of the Brooklyn Tenement House Committee. In these various ways the Committee is kept in active touch with movements relating to housing reform.

## TRAINING OF HOUSING WORKERS

Co-operating with the School of Philanthropy, a course of fifteen lectures on housing reform has been given each year to the first year students, with practical training in field work and inspection trips to study old-law, new-law and "improved" tenements. In 1912 a second year student of the school was assigned a fellowship in housing, and has devoted her entire time to investigation and report of different housing conditions, under the direction of the Secretary. One such study has resulted in active measures to clean up a neglected section of a neighboring community and the establishment of a settlement for factory workers living nearby.

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## EDUCATION OF THE TENANT

A general campaign of education has been started by the Committee. It includes simple direct talks on health and sanitation, how best use can be made of improvements provided by law, how the tenant creates fire dangers and what to do if a fire breaks out, practical suggestions on housekeeping, all from the standpoint of benefit to the tenant himself. In addition educational pamphlets along similar lines are being prepared for general distribution.

Talks have already been given before high school pupils, to clubs in settlements, churches and neighborhood associations. Lantern slides are used where possible and the interest already shown is warrant for carrying on the work on a larger scale.

The next step in bettering housing conditions is plain. The dirty neighbor, the irresponsible tenant, the careless match thrower, the fire-escape obstructor, the indifferent janitor, we have always with us. No department can make inspections frequently enough to restrain them. We must teach the tenant his responsibility.

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